

The Adventure Zone Royale: Episode 1

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Griffin: [in a deepened voice] The wizards gather eight—[in his regular voice] Oh, wait, fuck.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: [chortles]

Griffin: Okay, I got it now—

Justin: Theme music! [laughs]

Griffin: I got it—[laughs] All right.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: Shut up! [in a deepened voice] The wizards answer eight by eight. The Conclaves call to demonstrate their arcane gift, their single spell. They number 64. Until a conflagration! 63... And 62 they soon shall be, as one by one, the wizards die. 'Til one remains to reign on high.

[The Adventure Zone Royale theme music plays]

Griffin: Hello! And welcome back to The Adventure Zone. I don't know why I said back, this may be your first season. I don't know you. I don't know you from Adam's off ox. This is Griffin McElroy, I'll be your dungeon master this season. Joining me, as always, we got my brother, Justin. What's up, Juice?

Justin: Hey, what's up? It's me, Justin McElroy. So happy to be back with you again on The Adventure Zone. Another great season lined up for you.

Griffin: I'm in my head now that this is the first season someone's listened to, and now I feel like I'm doing this way too formal.

Justin: We should go back to the beginning. So, dad was born in Ohio.

Griffin: Mm-hm.

Clint: You remember the year?

Griffin: 1931.

Clint: Ah, so close.

Justin: 1955, August.

Clint: '55!

Justin: August of '55.

Griffin: I guess we'll do things out of order. Dad's also here. He's still kicking.

Clint: Yes. Hi, everybody!

Griffin: Still playing, still rolling.

Clint: Dad McElroy.

Travis: Wait, what order were you going in?

Griffin: I don't know, man.

Justin: We're rolling. A lot of people, dad, where—there was a lot of theories that you weren't going to be in this one. But you were—

Clint: Well, yeah.

Justin: Yeah.

Clint: Well, every time I post a picture on Instagram, people think it's a death notice. So... you know.

Griffin: Yeah. Sure, man. [chuckles]

Clint: Maybe I've dodged that bullet this time.

Justin: I've held off on making like thoughtful Father's Day posts, just because I'm so worried that someone's gonna misinterpret it.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Absolutely, it'll clock like that. We got Travis on the ones and twos.

Travis: Yeah, I'm up in the mix. Hi, it's me.

Griffin: You might—

Travis: I'll be playing this season.

Griffin: Yes, you'll be playing. I will be GMing. And everyone will be having the time of their lives. I want to start things off with a few sort of... clarifications before we get started with TAZ: Royale. First, even though our last experiment in modesty, which was TAZ: Abnimals, had no cursing in it... This one absolutely will.

Justin: Now, you don't know that.

Travis: Yeah, man, you don't fuckin' know that.

Justin: You don't know that!

Griffin: Bastard. *Bastard*.

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: Bastard. Ass.

Justin: Bastard people.

Griffin: So, if that is something that is a consideration for you, then you should stop listening. No, don't, keep listening. We'll try—

Travis: Or keep—yeah, keep listening and expand your horizons.

Griffin: Learn a thing or two. Second thing, as we have kind of announced, this season is our all-wizards battle royale style season. I know some people have some worries about a sort of like PvP campaign. I want to be clear before we get started, this is battle royale not in the... the Fortnite sense. The battle—the—I mean, I guess literally, the movie, Battle Royale, sense. Where it's a, you know, everyone's killing each other all the time. This is more of a... a competition. A Squid Game, if you will.

Justin: A lot of people die in Squid Game.

Griffin: A lot of people got down on Squid Game.

Justin: People *died* in Squid Game. Sorry. [titters] I said a lot of people die in Squid Game. So I'm not sure—

Travis: This is more like Physical 100.

Griffin: This one's only got 64 people in it. And physical—

Justin: Have you tried to clarify the number of people that will have their earthly lives snuffed out? Is that the clarification you want to make?

Griffin: This is Magical 64, which would have been a way better name for this season—

Clint: Oh!

Griffin: But already got all the key art made for it. Last thing, today's episode, just to sort of set expectations, we're gonna meet our characters. And we're gonna learn a little bit about this world and The Fold, and the

Conclave. And I want to be really clear that I was planning all of this before the pope stuff happened.

Clint: Yeah.

Griffin: That word was not really highly in circulation, Conclave, until recent...

Justin: Now, I thought—

Clint: Movies!

Justin: I thought in the intro, you said "cornclave"?

Travis: I wasn't gonna—I wasn't gonna say anything.

Griffin: Did it sound like—

Justin: Griffin, you were so lucky that you told us to hold our tongues. Because I could feel a psychic wave when you said "cornclave" that all of us would have like, "Oh, please, just one quick—I just want one kernel of truth I want to add to that."

Griffin: You're making—

Clint: One kernel!

Griffin: You're making fun of an accent right now. Do you feel good about that, Juice?

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: You're making fun of an accent—

Justin: I—yeah, no, no, yeah, I am, I—[chuckles]

Griffin: Are you feeling great right—you feeling big, feeling tough?

Justin: [in a silly British accent] I'm throwing old big stone through my glass house, aren't I?

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Mm-hm! You sure are.

Justin: [in a silly British accent] A frightful big stone indeed, gov'na!

Griffin: Let's begin. Travis, the velvety padded doors of the trial chamber swing shut behind you, ceiling with a bright green arcane glyph. You turn away from the door to face the room before you. It is a cramped, octagonal space, carved of white marble. Nearly featureless, save for the large numeral one set into the floor with gray tile.

Positioned at the center of this room, immediately above this carved one, is a chair, made of woven white birch, sitting in front of a wide column. And a figure has been carved into this column. It is a young man, his arms crossed before him. All white marble, save for his eyes, where two cloudy discs of onyx have been set.

And as you enter the room and approach this chair, and this young man carved into the column, you realize this figure is nearly identical to a younger version of yourself; Rictus Ravenwood IV. Travis, describe Rictus Ravenwood IV for me.

Travis: A high elf. He is a moon elf, so he has bluish skin. And he is dressed—pretty traditional goth ideals. But everything is in a neon palette. I've been envisioning it like if you went to like a roller rink or laser tag place in the late '90s.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: He has neon green hair kind of swooped down over his eyes.

Griffin: Badass.

Travis: A lot of like, neon orange fishnet. And he's wearing a like neon pink, neon green tie-dyed tank top.

Griffin: You guys are gonna change clothes like as soon as you get in here. So like, don't spend so much time on the—

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: Like, you're gonna get a new shirt.

Travis: Yeah, and he's very gaunt.

Griffin: And when you say traditional goth, are we talking sort of necromancer-fantasy style? Or are we talking about... like mall goth?

Travis: Like mall goth.

Griffin: Got you, got you. Rictus, you enter this room. You see this statue carved into the column in front of this chair that looks like a younger version of yourself. And you hear a voice call out from no sort of discernible direction. You hear it say:

Voice: Please be seated, and lower any psychic defenses you may possess.

Travis: Is there a chair?

Griffin: There is a chair of white, woven birch.

Rictus: Sorry, man, just sit... sit in the chair?

Voice: Speak up, please!

Rictus: Sorry, yeah. Sorry. This chair? The woven one?

Voice: Aspirant, there is but one chair in the room?

Rictus: I didn't want to assume, sorry. Sorry, man, yeah.

Travis: And he sits in the chair.

Griffin: There is a brief fanfare of horns through the walls, and this voice says:

Voice: Welcome to the Trial of Divination! The first of the Conclaves' eight trials, and the first magic received by this world from the Mother Realm. Divination is the study of secrets divulged and received. As you enter these trials, the eight Arch Wizards of the Octave would seek to know you completely. All you must do to pass this trial is reveal to us your past and present, and in exchange, it will show you a glimpse of the future that awaits the victor of this Conclave.

Rictus: Oh? Sick, man.

Voice: If you consent to the terms of the trial, gaze into the eyes of your stone figure, and we shall explore your past. Should you refuse, the door to the outside world will be open to you, and your aspiration shall be forfeit.

Travis: Rictus gazes as hard as he can.

Griffin: Okay. Are you—are you sort of—you start to feel immediately, a... a sort of psychic influence upon you. The Fold, the world where this story takes place, is an extremely magical place. I assume all of you as practitioners are familiar with at least sort of what it feels like to be under the effect of a spell. This is happening to you right now.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Griffin: Do you try and resist, or give in?

Travis: This is—his grandmother is a divination person who does—

Griffin: Everyone's got a divination grandmother in this world—

Travis: Yeah, everyone's got a divination grandmother.

Griffin: That's gotta be official.

Travis: And she doesn't have a lot of like personal boundary conception. So, he has had to put up with this a lot, so he's very used to it, and he's okay with it.

Griffin: We're gonna need to talk about Rictus' relationship with his grandmother at some point, because that—

Travis: Well, his whole family in general—

Griffin: Sounds like wicked unhealthy.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Yeah, sure. Well, let's get into it. You look up into these onyx eyes, and the fog inside of them begins to swirl. And your senses are consumed. In the world of The Fold, where our story takes place, everyone is bestowed a single magical talent from the moment of their birth. Not everyone discovers the spell which they and they alone have been granted, and fewer still are willing to spend the thousands of hours of study required to truly master their one arcane ability.

As this divination magic scans through your past, Rictus, its focus settles on one of your most poignant core memories. You remember the moment that you discovered the nature of your unique gift. Take us back, Rictus, to the moment where you discovered your one magical spell, as we learn a little bit about your character.

Travis: Rictus was seven years old. From birth, basically as soon as, you know, he was able to like sit up, his family... there was a lot of pressure. It's a family of necromancers.

Griffin: They put pressure on a baby?

Travis: I mean, basically they started like... looking for the magic to manifest.

Griffin: I guess if everyone has a power, as I just said, there will be a Jack-Jack situation every now—

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Every now and then.

Travis: Well, and like, instead of like toys and stuff, he was given a lot of like dead body parts to see if he would animate them.

Griffin: *Jesus Christ.*

Travis: His father is a baron of an area called The Crossroads and The Breathless Fields.

Justin: Oh, mine too.

Griffin: [guffaws]

Justin: [chuckles] I didn't know we could just say it, sorry.

Travis: So there's—

Justin: [chuckles] Dibs.

Travis: And he is the only child.

Justin: I have two baron dads.

Griffin: Awesome.

Justin: [chuckles] Both my dads are barons.

Griffin: We'll come back to—

Travis: Oh? Sick.

Griffin: We'll come back to that in your flash—

Justin: [titters] Okay.

Griffin: Flashback.

Justin: It's good.

Clint: My mother is baron.

Griffin: All right, next!

Travis: Sick. He is an only child, as every Ravenwood baron has been, because of the blessing curse.

Griffin: Deleting sibling NPC names...

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: [chuckles] Those go back in the hopper.

Travis: He hasn't had a lot of experience with other people, so Rictus doesn't know if seven is like, a normal age for it to manifest. But with the pressure on it—

Griffin: Gotcha.

Travis: It happens. And so, Rictus is sitting at the table where he sits most days to practice under his parents' watchful eyes. With all these like sickly, you know, woodland creatures around that he's kind of being pressured to test his power on.

Griffin: Okay, I like that you're sitting at a desk, seven years old, little Rictus Ravenwood IV. [titters] A desk filled with dead critters. Your mother, did she have a name, or may I?

Travis: Go for it.

Griffin: Your mother, Somna. Somna Ravenwood, the... doesn't have a number. That would be wild. Somna Ravenwood is just kind of like perched on your desk, staring at you. Her face still like a... almost a creepy mask. So intense is the pressure that she is putting on you. You may not know other kids who are living sort of a similar life as you. I think even with that sort of isolation that you experience, you probably have an inkling that this is pretty intense for seven years old. Seated in the corner, in a rocking chair made out of bones, reading a newspaper made out of bones, is your father, Baron... did he have a name?

Travis: Rictus Ravenwood III.

Griffin: That makes so much sense and I'm so glad that you said it in the tone you did. Because that's exactly what I deserved. Rictus Ravenwood III, sitting, reading his bone paper.

Travis: And over his shoulder is the ghost of Rictus Ravenwood II.

Griffin: Uh-huh. And over his shoulder is another smaller ghost of your great grandfather—

Travis: Yes!

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: Rictus Ravenwood I.

Travis: That's correct.

Griffin: And they called him 'the first' too, which is fucked up.

Travis: Well, with the blessing—

Griffin: Yeah, I guess—

Travis: Curse, he knew he would have a son.

Griffin: Yeah. Cool. Your mother says:

Somna: Again, Rictus? Again? Remember, we want the life spirit to disperse from the object. Do not think of it as a draining like drinking a drink with a straw. It is a... it is a dispersal, Rictus.

Rictus: Okay.

Somna: Again!

Rictus: [stammering] Ah—oh... I... Can we take a break?

Somna: We will take a break after your five-hundredth murder.

Griffin: [titters]

Somna: Now begin. You're at 126. We're gonna have a long afternoon, Rictus.

Rictus: Okay...

Travis: And he places his hand on like a sickly chipmunk looking creature.

Griffin: Maybe a chipmunk?

Travis: Well, but it's not quite. I mean, in The Breathless Fields, everything's... weird.

Griffin: Like fucked up?

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: I like that. Okay.

Travis: And he grimaces. And like beads of sweat, you know? And then there's a sickly green kind of glow. And when he moves his hand, the chipmunk is like fully dead.

Griffin: Somna leaps up, shouts:

Somna: *Ah-ha!*

Griffin: And your father, Baron Rictus Ravenwood, the third, Baron of The Crossroads in The Breathless Fields, hops out of his bone rocking chair and comes over. Puts his hand on his on your shoulder and is like:

Baron: Wow, son! Amazing work! Did—wait, did you crush it with your hand, or was this an honest necromantic spell?

Rictus: No... yeah... it was... it was a spell...

Baron: Oh, mother, he's done it. I'm so proud of you, son.

Rictus: And look. Look what else.

Travis: And Rictus moves his left hand. And there was another chipmunk under there, and there's like... a pink glow. And that chipmunk is healed.

Griffin: Your spell that Rictus Ravenwood IV possesses, since this moment and practiced onward, is Wither and Bloom. Specifically, a slightly weaker homebrew version of Wither and Bloom in the first level, as you are all level one wizards as we begin the game. Your mother looks confused. Your father leans down and picks up this chipmunk that you just brought back to life. And he says:

Baron: Oh... Rictus, what... what is—what is this?

Rictus: Well, I—so... you were talking about the life dispersing, and that seemed like a bit of a waste. And so I thought, if I could take from there and give to there, it would like balance it a little bit more?

Griffin: Somna faints, and then stands up, and then faints a second time. And then she climbs up, back up—

Travis: A double feint, ugh...

Griffin: Back on to the desk and says:

Somna: Balance? It is not our family's job to be concerned with balance. By ensuring the death and entropy of these lands, we are balancing. Life is not our domain, Rictus. You must forget this part of this spell and just kind of do the first half.

Rictus: But it's connected?

Somna: Is that possible? We'll practice that, 500 times, doing just the murder and none of the bringing back to life stuff.

Rictus: But it's... it's connected, right? Because like the... you know, like dies and would fertilize the thing, right? And then grow. So this way—

Griffin: Somna faints in the middle of your explanation.

Justin: [titters]

Griffin: Your father, the Baron, faints too. Like sees it, sees her faint—

Travis: Did the ghost faint?

Griffin: All but your great grandfather.

Travis: Oh.

Griffin: His ghost. Who you think like nods at you, but his ghost is so small right now.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Because it's so old. And as we all know, as ghosts get older, they shrink down and get smaller.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Your father stands up and says:

Baron: Okay... we will continue practicing this. I'll call in some of our... some of our experts in the field. I think we had a great grand uncle once whose magic was also a little weird. So, I can find his body and reanimate him, ask him five questions, the usual. And... listen, sport, it is a little bit weird. We usually only kill and not revive. And we have a certain reputation to uphold, and... the Barony has a reputation to uphold. But it's nothing to worry about, I will ensure that your little snafu gets ironed out. But let's not go ahead and cast that anymore until we figure this thing out together as a family. Isn't that, right, mother—she's still—she's asleep. Yes. So, remember, it's a secret!

Griffin: Your senses return, Rictus, and you are back sitting in the first trial chamber. This statue that resembles this seven year old version of you that you just saw begins to rumble, as its right arm slowly descends, extending its hand out in front of you. And from the walls of the room, that voice calls out again and says:

Voice: Aspirant, by your participation in the Conclave, you wager the very magic that brought you to our doors. Should you claim victory, your power will grow an unimaginable magnitude. If you agree to these terms, grasp the hand of your effigy.

Rictus: So, if I win, then I get more magic, and if I lose, my magic goes away?

Voice: You understand the terms, yes. More magic is a reductive way of referring to the power that you will be afforded, should you win.

Justin: "We prefer mega-magic."

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: "We prefer turbo magic."

Travis: "Super-duper—"

Clint: "Mondo magic!"

Justin: "The trademarkable one was uber magic." [titters]

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: "With a—but you have to do an umlaut, or you'll get sued by Uber."

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: "It's You-Ber."

Griffin: What do you do, Rictus?

Travis: Rictus thinks for a second, and then like half under his breath:

Rictus: Seems win-win.

Travis: And grabs the hand. Is that what he's supposed to do?

Griffin: Yes, you grasp the hand of your effigy, this cold hand before you. And a silent moment passes, and then those black onyx eyes begin to rattle before emitting a blinding flash of brilliant light.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

[theme music plays]

Griffin: Justin...

Justin: Yes, Griffin?

Griffin: Ready yourself.

Justin: I'm prepared. [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Justin: I'm ready to pretend!

Travis: Brace your ass for imagination!

Griffin: In a separate but identical trial chamber, you release the enormous hand of your stone effigy, having agreed to its first condition. Its arm raises back up to cross its chest, and then the entire figure begins to rumble, as the column into which it is etched slowly rotates. As it grinds to a halt, you see a different figure is now facing the chair in which you sit. A chair that you still don't quite trust to fully support your considerable frame. This figure also resembles you, not from your distant past, but as you are today. Justin, please describe and introduce—and I saw this name for the first time this morning, Lorovith Dreamwanderer Gonjavon.

Justin: No, well, technically, Lorovith Gonjavon Dreamwanderer. The middle name—it's just the way the sheep mixes it up.

Griffin: So, once—one mo' again, please.

Justin: Lorovith Dreamwanderer Gonjavon.

Griffin: Well, wait, you just said Dreamwanderer is the last name?

Justin: Mm-hm. So, Lorovith Dreamwanderer Gonjavon. That's what we're settling with. Yes, we're going with this. Yes.

Griffin: You want Gonjavon to be last name, or do you want Dreamwanderer to be last name?

Justin: Well, it's... I think it's more appropriate for—looking at goliath culture, for Dreamwanderer be the middle name.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: Gonjavon's the last name, yes.

Griffin: Do you—are you stuck with—are you settled on Lorovith being the first name? You could be—

Justin: Yes!

Griffin: Gonjavon Lorovith Dreamwanderer—

Justin: No, no, Lorovith is first!

Griffin: Okay, great, fantastic. Okay, describe your goliath wizard for us, please.

Justin: Yeah. Lorovith is approximately seven feet tall. Looks kind of like Tom Hardy, but a lot grayer. And got markings on his skin. Goliath have these skin modeling some people mistake for tattoos, but it's just more akin to like a birthmark. And it's just a—and he's wearing some leather armor. Pretty simple, but well—you can tell it's well-used. It's been through a lot. And yeah, that's his story.

Griffin: What kind of—I don't know what goliath age looks like. So I guess not a specific number, but what sort of era of his life?

Justin: You—he would look to be someone in the sort of later prime of his life. He's not a young guy, but he still seems full of vim and vigor.

Griffin: Okay. And Tom Hardy, I do just want to make clear, is five foot nine.

Justin: So, okay, so, if you can use the—

Griffin: Like a huge Tom Hardy.

Justin: So like if you can use the power of your imagination for a second.

Griffin: To imagine a big Tom Hardy?

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Dude, I mean, I'm GMing this season—

Justin: Grab the corner of the Tom hardy—grab the corner of your Tom Hardy window and just like—

Griffin: [laughs] Hold shift, stretch.

Justin: Just hold Ctrl T to—yeah. You don't actually have to Ctrl anymore in Photoshop 25.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: It defaults.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: It's like, I'm just giving you a type, man.

Griffin: Tall Hardy. I get it. I love it. It's good.

Justin: Tall Hardy.

Griffin: You look up at the face of your giant white marble figure, having just explored the—your past, the moment of your power's arrival. You hear that voice rumble through the walls again. It says:

Voice: The Arch Wizards of the Octave thank you for revealing to us the events that shaped your past. Now, we would ask you to show us your present. Your life as you know it now, in the days leading up to your arrival at this Conclave. If you consent to this request, gaze into the eyes of the statue before you, as before. Should you deny our terms, the door to the outside world will be opened for your retreat.

Griffin: What do you do?

Justin: I go for it. Yeah, no hesitation.

Griffin: You look upward, and look into these eyes, and see the onyx begin to become very cloudy. I ask you, do you resist, or do you give into this psychic spell that is being cast?

Justin: I give into the psychic spell. I'm not fighting it at all.

Griffin: Great. Your senses are consumed, once again. The eight Arch Wizards of the Octave are the supreme power of The Fold in more ways than one. From their mighty floating Zigguraut in the sky, they police the use of magic of the world, sharing whatever wisdom they decide the inhabitants of the lands below are ready for. They are a secluded lot, never revealing themselves to the lesser wizards of The Fold. But legend of their comprehensive grasp of all magics are known by all.

The Conclave is held once every few generations, when one of the eight members of the Octave resigns. The details of what happens during a Conclave are unknown to any living person. Similarly unpredictable is the date that a Conclave would be called, given the Octave's general elusiveness. Lorovith, I want you to describe what your day looked like. The day that you received your invitation to the Conclave. A little slice of what just a normal day looked like before sort of everything changed.

Justin: Okay. There are four stumps, and they're in a quadrant, a big square. Probably about 10 yards separating each one. Lorovith stands on a smaller stump about six inches off the ground. There are other goliath perched on the other stumps in a sort of like quadrant around him. He is standing with both hands extended out. And a goliath across from him, who we know to be Noren, holds a big ball in the air, and is getting ready to chuck it at Lorovith.

Griffin: Okay. I don't know what's going on, but let's—

Justin: You're playing—we're playing goat ball.

Griffin: Goat ball, wonderful. [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah.

Griffin: Goat ball. Goat ball! Wonderful. Let's... let's get a... are you trying to hit this? But what's gonna—you tell me what the intention is to happen next.

I think it would be fun to roll for sports, just to really get this season started off on the right foot.

Lorovith: I'm ready, Noren! At any moment. Toos the ball, I'm ready. It's been your sixth... sixth attempt! Sixth attempt in a row, Noren. Please, give me the glory of a seventh catch.

Noren: I'm definitely going to hit you with it this time? I—

Justin: You're attempting—so, goat ball, we're attempting—it's like a dodge ball kind of deal?

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: So you're attempting to catch it, or get pegged, but don't fall off, right?

Griffin: Okay, I got you. Let me try that again, then.

Lorovith: Never mind, I forgot the rules! Get ready to get pegged!

Griffin: And he's gonna launch it at you. Maybe just a dex—

Travis: Our first T-shirt.

Griffin: I think a dexterity saving throw? Or perhaps just athletics, right? This is a sport.

Justin: It's a sport.

Griffin: I would say athletics, actually.

Justin: Okay... the—that's actually what I think you would actually roll in the rules for goat ball success.

Griffin: It says that—

Justin: I'll show you some maps later, if you want to do it.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: Nine plus three is 12.

Griffin: With a 12, you are able to grab this ball out of the air. You sense that he didn't throw full strength, because he's still not 100% sure what the rules of goat ball are. And I sympathize with Noren on that.

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: You now have the ball.

Lorovith: A fine attempt, Noren! A fine attempt!

Noren: Am I out?

Travis: [laughs]

Lorovith: No, no, no, no, no, Noren, now, now, Noren—

Justin: [chuckles]

Lorovith: Now, I get my chance at an unprecedented tenth victory!

Justin: And then I'm gonna chuck it, not at Noren—

Griffin: Oh, fuck?

Justin: But to the left.

Clint: Oh? [chuckles]

Justin: At Zapoth.

Griffin: Shit...

Travis: I never would assume—

Griffin: Zapoth looks up—

Travis: Classic—ah, it's so good.

Clint: My, oh, my! We didn't see this one coming!

Griffin: We're gonna roll and see how Zapoth does. I mean, Zapoth gets an 18.

Justin: And I—okay, but I'm gonna need advantage, because Zapoth was not expecting that. I set up the whole thing.

Griffin: That's a fair point. You get a round of surprise on Zapoth as he tries to dodge out of the way with his athletics check. Which is just a nine, sadly. Zapoth goes:

Zapoth: Hey, did you say—

Griffin: [spoofs the sound of an impact] Bfv!

Zapoth: Aah!

Clint: [chuckles]

Lorovith: Ha-ha!

Zapoth: Why is the ball so hard?

Lorovith: Zapoth Foo Pickanalla Karmoonay, you have embarrassed your tribe! Ha-ha!

Zapoth: All right, man, it's just goat ball?

Griffin: He gets off his stump and walks away.

Zapoth: Am I—I'm out, right?

Justin: [chuckles]

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: As you are playing this game of goat ball, you hear a rustling in the in the trees just outside of the clearing where the goat ball field is set up. And you see a team of non-goliath, human elf, half elf wizards, in school garb. And some of them are holding what look like bats in their hands. There's some balls with weird holes in them. And you see a figure approach you wearing one of these uniforms, and he says:

Figure: I'm terribly sorry, Lorovith, but it is time for softball league. I will need you and your friends to please clear off the field.

Lorovith: [laughs] Of course, actually, the challenge of this was becoming rather disappointing.

Figure: Yes. I need you actually, to speak with the groundskeeper. We've been doing some remodeling, some renovations, and so we're moving some stuff around. And so, unfortunately, we will need to move the goat ball field a little bit deeper into Spider Fang Hollow to make room for the new library wing.

Griffin: You retrieve the ball and stand back on your sump. Noren says:

Noren: Can I—can I just get out? Get myself out? Because it looked like you really hurt Zapoth with the ball, and I'm not trying—

Lorovith: Zapoth was only hurt because Zapoth did not catch it! If Zapoth had caught it, Zapoth would have the valor today!

Noren: Okay, but I—it did look painful, and I... actually—

Lorovith: Hup!

Justin: And then I toss the ball while he's talking. [chuckles]

Griffin: [titters] All right, at—

Justin: No, I'm just kidding.

Griffin: Noren?

Justin: This is a fun—we're having fun here. The game is—I—the game is over.

Griffin: Oh? Okay.

Justin: I won. So when I say "the victory," I won the goat ball game with the last attack I did.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: So, congratulations for me.

Griffin: You look over on the fourth stump, at Grakhan Rootpicker. The closest thing you have to a rival here in your goliath tribe.

Lorovith: Grakhan, did you see?!

Grakhan: Yes.

Lorovith: Brother Agvec, his record has been shattered by Lorovith Dreamwanderer Gonjavon!

Grakhan: Yes, I'm sure you feel very accomplished, beaming Zapoth. A goliath that a human child could defeat in goat ball, if they were large enough to lift the goat ball.

Lorovith: I would have tossed it your way, Grakhan, but I would have been too worried about shattering your delicate bones. [laughs]

Grakhan: Oh? Are you challenging Grakhan?

Lorovith: Sorry.

Grakhan: Very well...

Griffin: Grakhan is a bit bigger than you are. How magical are the goliaths? Like I said, every sort of like being—

Justin: Right, so... goliath are obviously like physically pretty dominant.

Griffin: Right.

Justin: And so they do not, as a rule, tend to go into the—like the magical arts, I think, or focus on that. I think that for the goliath in this world, I think that the ones who have focused on their talents and tried to work on them are the ones who... for whom it could have some practical purpose.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: For the tribe. Something that they could like do to help.

Griffin: A handful, maybe, of people on your—on your tribe do—

Justin: I feel that, yeah. And I feel like for some, it's maybe more of like a novelty, you know what I mean? Or something—or like not even a big part of their day to day lives.

Griffin: Grakhan says:

Grakhan: I'm terribly sorry, Lorovith. You did besmirch my pride with that comment. And now it is my terms through which we shall put this grief aside. I'm afraid I need you to return to your stump for a... sudden death lightning round of goat ball.

Lorovith: It would be my honor, Grakhan!

Justin: And I slap him on the shoulder as hard as I can, and head on over.

Griffin: Okay! He takes the goat ball from Noren, who then just like runs off into the brush.

Travis: Crying?

Griffin: Grakhan—what's that?

Travis: Crying?

Griffin: Hm...

Justin: [titters] Check for crying. Roll for crying.

Griffin: No, I don't think—goliaths don't cry.

Travis: Oh?

Justin: Wow.

Griffin: Yeah. And it's like a real problem in the whole society.

Travis: Pretty toxic.

Griffin: Grakhan takes the... takes the goat ball up. And rears back to toss it in your direction. He hums it, but good. Grakhan is a big, beefy fellow. What do you do?

Justin: I am... I mean, I'm gonna roll athletics against it.

Griffin: Okay?

Justin: It's like literally all I can do. Oh my gosh, what a moment.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: What a moment. That's two plus three, five.

Griffin: The goat ball smashes into your face. Your hands are just a little bit too slow. And you go wobbling backwards, off of the stump. And you take two points of bludgeoning damage. You—

Justin: Can you imagine your friend throwing a ball at you so hard it one-fifth killed you? I mean, can you even imagine?

[group chuckle]

Griffin: Yeah, I forgot.

Justin: You're seven feet tall, and your friend throws a ball at you so hard, you're a fifth more dead.

Griffin: Yeah.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Griffin: When I had this idea of like, what if it was a battle royale season, all wizards starting at level one? And then I looked at your guys' HP and I was like, this maybe was a bad idea.

Travis: We are made of gelatin!

Justin: [chuckles]

Griffin: You are gelatin boys. As the ball kind of rolls to a halt next to you, Grakhan yells:

Grakhan: I am not yet satisfied. It is your ball, Lorovith.

Lorovith: [growls] *Hmm!* Excellent!

Justin: All right, I've returned to my post.

Griffin: Okay.

Justin: See, goliath are very competitive, but cheating or any sort of like trickery or anything would be super out of line. So, I'm not trying to like reinvent the wheel here, I just gotta keep taking my chances.

[sound of dice thrown]

Justin: That's a one! That's actually a one that I rolled there. [laughs]

Griffin: You just—[chuckles]

Justin: This was not supposed to be a defining moment for this character.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: But it's like, he's now failed so badly now, it feels like a trajectory! Like some path of destiny has been forged here by his terrible, terrible inability to beat Grakhan at goat ball.

Griffin: He catches the ball effortlessly. And you put all the mustard on it that you could handle. He sighs and says:

Grakhan: I'm sorry, this is just not sporting. It's not doing it for me. Perhaps just a normal battle would suffice?

Griffin: And he holds up a hand towards the sky. And as he does so, a chunk of earth rips out of the ground. And he says:

Grakhan: Let's see if you can catch this.

Griffin: And he hurls it at you.

Justin: Cool! Okay, excellent. I will cast Lightning Lure, to create a lash of energy that strikes one creature in front of my choice that I can see within 15 feet. I'm gonna use Lightning Lure to try to deflect the stone.

Griffin: Are you aiming at the stone, or are you aiming at Grakhan?

Justin: I'm aiming at the stone.

Griffin: Okay, cool! Make your... make your attack roll here.

Justin: Okay...

Griffin: Or is this a save situation?

Justin: Maybe I could just be against—maybe the roll is against Grakhan, but the—you know, like—

Griffin: Yeah, that's a good point. Yeah, okay, Grakhan will try and make this strength save. We're trying to beat strength 12...

[sound of dice thrown]

Griffin: That is a... nine! Your lightning lure, what's it look like?

Justin: It's like a... looks almost like a wisp of frost. Like a breath that you exhale when it's really cold, with more ice crystals in it. And it kind of crackles with what could only be described as a dark electricity. [titters]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Travis: Mm-hm. People have tried to describe it a different way, but—

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: Yeah.

Justin: It can only be described as a cold electricity. [titters]

Clint: But it's impossible, you can't.

Travis: They tried!

Justin: You can't, dad, it's—some things are more than words. [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: Some things you really have to see. Honestly, Griffin, my words can't do it judge—justice. [chuckles] I won't even try.

Clint: [chuckles]

Justin: You have to see it to believe it.

Travis: It's like trying to—

Griffin: You—[titters]

Travis: Describe like a sixth dimension, Griffin.

Griffin: Sure, my mind can't possibly conceive.

Justin: Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the blue corn moon, Griffin?

Griffin: I have not.

Justin: This is what...

Griffin: No. Not to the blue Cornclave moon have I heard the wolf cry.

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: Your Lightning Lure whips through the rock, splitting it dramatically. The two lobes of this chunk of earth roll to either side of you. As you prepare a counter or to brace yourself, as Grakhan leaps off of his stump, the battle, which has now drawn quite a crowd, is interrupted by a discordant, eight-toned horn sounding from above. And all goliath eyes look upward to the flying island with the Octave Zigguraut on it. It is blocking out the sun, casting a shadow over the goliath village here.

And surrounding this floating island, 64 pinpricks of light appear in the sky over the structure, whirling in a circle around the island, before dispersing and falling to the ground like meteorites. And Lorovith, you see an eight-sided crystal soar towards where you are standing. And as it approaches, holding your breath, you see it zooming towards you, before curving at the very last second, to land in the hands of Grakhan Rootpicker. And he looks

down at it, looks up at you, and just bellows a big, hearty laugh. And he says:

Grakhan: [laughs] Perhaps we should put our petty squabbles aside? It would seem the gods have chosen the victor for us.

[pause]

Justin: So what happens then?

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: I mean, I'm just watching. You've got this crazy crystal, I'm on—I'm on pins and needles over here, Griff!

Griffin: The crowd assembled walks forward, and they begin to peer at Grakhan. Some sort of kneeling. This is a momentous occasion. And then there is a whizzing sound that cuts across the crowd. And instinctively, because of the goat ball you've been playing, you reach up your hand and catch an identical crystal from the sky. And Grakhan looks up at you with shock and... a little bit of malice.

Justin: [titters]

Lorovith: Well, Grakhan, it seems you've spared the lamenters the work of exiling you.

Griffin: He stands and says:

[pause]

Travis: "Fuck you, dude."

Justin: Here's what he's—

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: Here's what he says. He says, "Come back." [chuckles] Because Lorovith says:

Lorovith: First to the Conclave wins!

Grakhan: No, wait, hold on! It's not for two days!

Griffin: [titters] You take off running towards the meeting point described on the crystal. And now this scene, whatever magic is sort of like going through your memories of the past few days, zooms forwards, leading up to your ferrying across the crystalline still waters of Loch Reach, where the Octave Zigguraut and its artificial surrounding island had sort of temporarily docked.

And this vision goes through the moment you sort of passed through these 64 stone archways carved into the underside of the island. And then through your passing through this padded door, sitting down beside your stone effigy, exploring your past. And then you have the like really disorienting feeling, as your memories catch up to the present moment, leaving you back in the seat, facing your marble doppelganger, as it slowly extends its hand. And you hear the voice say:

Voice: Aspirant, by your participation in the Conclave, you abandon the world and its ways as you know them. Within these walls, truths concerning the fundamental underpinnings of The Fold itself will be illuminated to you. You will never again walk the world in the manner you are accustomed after understanding the world in this way. If you agree to these terms, grasp the hand of your effigy.

Lorovith: May I say one thing first?

Voice: Go right ahead.

Lorovith: Grakhan was extremely lucky that day! I want it made clear. Eight out of nine times I would have caught both of those. He was extremely lucky, and there was a great deal of sun.

Griffin: There's a pause.

Clint: [chuckles]

Griffin: You hear—

Lorovith: Should you have chosen other memories, you would have seen a much different scene. This is all I wish to say.

Griffin: That voice pauses for a moment, and then you hear it say:

Voice: It shall be very exciting to watch the two of you squash your beef.\

Justin: That's what he says?

Griffin: That's exactly what he says.

Justin: He says "squash your beef?"

Griffin: Yeah. But that's like a goliath term. It's like not—it doesn't—it literally means like hitting each other's meat. Like it doesn't mean what it means—

Travis: Just two meaty men, slappy men.

Justin: Two big, beating lions!

Clint: [laughs]

Griffin: Beefy men smashing beef.

Justin: Smashing earth-colored meat. [chuckles]

Griffin: What do you do? The statue's hand is sort of stretched out in front of you, asking you to agree to these terms.

Justin: I give it a big, meaty, firm handshake.

Griffin: Okay. You reach forward and grasp the stony hand before you. And a silent moment passes, and then those black onyx eyes begin to rattle, and again, emit a blinding flash of light. Dad!

Clint: Mm-hm?

Griffin: In yet another separate but identical trial chamber, you release the hand-like appendage of your stone effigy, having now agreed to its first two conditions. And once again, the statue's arm grinds back upwards over its chest, as the column at the center of the room rotates, revealing a final version of you. And this one is sort of the most startling. It is an older version of you, but not like worn-down and weary-looking. You know how some people get when they get a little bit older? Do you know what I—

Clint: No. I have no idea what you're talking about.

Griffin: Do you know what I mean by that, dad?

Clint: Mm-mm.

Travis: Sometimes, dad, as the body ages, the light leaves the eyes.

Griffin: Yes. That is—

Travis: The vim, the vigor is gone.

Clint: I choose not to accept that inevitability.

Travis: Okay.

Griffin: That's good. That's good.

Justin: They're talking about me, dad. They're talking about me. [chuckles]

Griffin: [chuckles]

Clint: Okay, then I—yeah.

Justin: Okay, thank you, you're being very kind. Thank you.

Clint: Yeah, I see. I—okay, I see it. Yeah.

Griffin: This is—this is—

Justin: *Wow.*

Griffin: Not a frail version of yourself. This is, in many ways, this is you perfected. You see carved onto your body are robes etched with these meticulously drawn runes. One thing about this particular effigy stands out. While the statue is still carved of white marble, like the others with the onyx eyes, it is also wearing what looks like a gauntlet of finely woven leather that reaches up past its elbow-like joint. A real gauntlet, not a part of the carving. I keep saying like hand-like and elbow-like because the figure you're sitting before is distinctly not human. So, dad, can you describe Hellgrammite, and introduce your character, please?

Clint: Yeah, Hellgrammite is a Thrikeen, an insectoid race. Walks on two legs, has two regular arms, and then two smaller arms beneath them. He also has a tail, like a scorpion, like a scorpion stinger. He is a... he has, of course, a carapace. Is it chitin (kai-tin) or chitin (chai-tin)? I guess it's chitin (kai-tin).

Griffin: I always say chitin (kai-tin)—

Travis: It's chitin (kai-tin).

Griffin: And I've never bothered to look up if that's okay. But I say that word a lot on this show in particular, and I don't think it's one of the many things I've been corrected on.

Clint: It's iridescent. It's kind of like, depending on how the light hits it, kind of orange or gold. There's a little bit of green in there. And, you know, big—great, big eyes, couple of antenna. Mandibles!

Griffin: Love it.

Travis: Of course, yeah.

Clint: Instead of a mouth. Gotta have the mandibles, that's mandatory mandibles.

Griffin: [titters] Yeah, sure. That's why they're called that.

Clint: And he is one of the Scritch, which is kind of the colony of Thrikeen that he belongs to.

Griffin: Amazing.

Travis: And which one of those aspects, dad, gives you heroic inspiration to start this adventure? Because I see—

Griffin: Oh, don't get it—don't get it twisted. He's—oh, he does have heroic inspiration. [chuckles]

Travis: I see that you've marked it on your sheet.

Justin: [laughs]

Griffin: You made a character so good you're like, "I kick so much ass, I'm gonna give myself a point of inspiration."

Justin: He's inspired himself!

Clint: I don't know what you're talking about! There's no heroic inspiration on there?

Griffin: That's so great. Okay, Hellgrammite, you look up to this carving of your perfected sort of insectoid form, and you hear that voice rumble through the walls once again. And it says:

Voice: The Octave thanks you sincerely for your vulnerability in these matters. You have but one more vision to face before concluding the Trial of Divination and... well, this one's everyone's favorite. It is a vision of one possible future, the one that awaits you atop the Zigguraut, should you

outlast your three score and three competitors. If you consent to receive this vision, gaze into the eyes of the statue before you. The exit is also available, but you'd be off your knot to leave at this point.

Griffin: What do you do?

Clint: [sucks air through teeth while thinking]

Griffin: That can't—that's not your voice, right?

Clint: No—[aggressive snorkeling sounds] no, uh-uh— no.

Griffin: I thought—dad, you have to understand, when you told me that you're playing insectoid Thrikeen—

Clint: I know!

Griffin: And you're like, "Get ready." I thought when you went—[sucks air through teeth] that was the voice you had chosen for the character for the whole season. And I got real nervous about that.

Clint: I understand. But no. That would be very difficult.

Griffin: Sure.

Clint: I think Hellgrammite is very hesitant. He's not that trusting a soul. But eventually, he does look into the eyes.

Griffin: And do you resist the psychic force that you feel upon you?

Clint: Hm... in for a penny, in for a pound, no?

Griffin: Okay.

Clint: Bring it on, hoss.

Griffin: You look up into the eyes of your effigy, and you are somewhere very far away now. This world, The Fold, is defined by its magical

abundance. It is a place where everyone, to some extent, possesses some supernatural thing that nobody else can do. You, Hellgrammite, like every other aspirant here, you are familiar with the like flavor of magic. Like what it feels like to break some physical rule of reality.

In the vision you are experiencing, where you have claimed victory in the Conclave and become one of the all-powerful Octave, this vision you are feeling, it is not this usual flavor of magic you know. This is something completely different. You feel a touch of Godhood. And right away, you have the thought that it—you know, this vision is making the power that you wield, the spell that you have sort of practiced furiously, feel pointless and insignificant. It is a trick.

And this is not a trick, or like a repertoire of tricks. This is a... a communion with the primal energies of magic. You can quite literally do anything, Hellgrammite. You've just won the Conclave. What do you do?

Clint: Hellgrammite returns to the Scritch. Returns to the colony from whence he came.

Griffin: There are—

Clint: And...

Griffin: Just like, describe where the Scritch live. Is it a hive situation? Is it a hill?

Clint: It's a hive—more of—it's almost like... an ant hill. It's, I mean, it's—

Griffin: Gotcha.

Clint: Massive. And he goes in through the tunnels, there are all these different chambers. As we'll find out, this is where he got his start, just as one of the lowly worker Scritch tending to the eggs in the nursery. They were called the Bleh, these workers.

Griffin: [titters]

Clint: He was—he was one of the Bleh.

Griffin: Okay. Do you have to say it like that?

Clint: *Bleh.*

Griffin: *Bleh.*

Clint: Yeah, mm-hm.

Griffin: Okay, cool.

Clint: Yeah, Bleh. But now, seething with power as he walks through the tunnels and the passageways, the other Scritch are drawn to him and—

Griffin: Oh, for sure, dude.

Clint: For some mysterious—just kind of follow him.

Griffin: I mean, not for some mysterious reason. I should make this clear. You are now one of the Octave. You are one of the eight Arch Wizards of the realm. You are not strictly a god, but I think thought of very much as a conduit to, you know, some sort of divine, magical power. And the fact that a Thrikeen has won the Conclave, it is like—I mean, it's the—it's the end of a Star Wars movie in here. There's jubilation—

Clint: Right.

Griffin: And fireworks, and instruments made out of mushrooms and shit. People are very excited about your return.

Clint: So, he... he actually, followed by this mob, walks into the chamber of the queen. Huge, great, big, gigantic chamber. And the queen is being tended to by smaller Scritch, you know, fussing over her. And Hellgrammite walks right up to her, but then turns his back on her.

Griffin: Whoa?

Clint: And addresses the crowd. And says:

Hellgrammite: Brethren and sistren Scritch, I come before you a changed individual. I am here seething with power, with magic! Lots and lots of it, like a buttload of magic. And I feel it is time for the Scritch to attain their place in this world. I am going to share this magic with all of you. I am going to elevate your power, and we can take our place as a mighty race. But before we can do that, I must have the mandate of all the Scritch. And to gain this mandate...

Clint: And he turns back to face the queen. And says:

Hellgrammite: We must overthrow the matriarchy, and make me the king of the Scritch.

Griffin: Without sweating your intrusion here and the mob that has formed, the queen of the Scritch, the brood mother, a massive sort of indeterminate insect, Queen Larvosa, gestures towards you and says:

Queen Larvosa: Seize him.

Griffin: And suddenly, a moment later, there are a dozen soldier ants, all wielding spears, all wearing the armor of their defeated insect enemies. They all charge you and try to hold you still with their spears. What do you do?

Clint: I am going to repulse them. Actually. I'm going to incapacitate them. I don't want to kill anybody. Well, what spells does he have at his command?

Griffin: You can do anything. You have control over all magic that has ever or will ever exist.

Clint: Oh.

Griffin: If you—we don't need to stick to 5e rules here, if you don't want to. I mean—[titters] Or if you want to showcase your, you know, talent or

whatever, this is—this is an opportunity for you to do whatever the fuck you want. I am not going to worry about—

Travis: Make water!

Griffin: [chuckles]

Clint: Then I am going to turn to all these soldiers and mentally command them.

Hellgrammite: Put down your weapons and stay your hands.

Griffin: There is—there is no resistance at all. They all... they all drop their spears.

Hellgrammite: I wish not to use this power on the rest of you. I want you to come to me willingly. Throw off the mantle of being drones, and rise with me, friends!

Griffin: A little—

Hellgrammite: Are you with me?!

Griffin: A little flea man raises his hand.

Flea Man: Hi, hi... sorry... aren't you mind controlling them right now? Which is kind of like drone... drone business.

Hellgrammite: I wish not to control you, my wee friend. I want you to come to me willingly, and if you say yay, you will be the first of my converts.

Flea Man: Oh, hell yeah. Yeah, let's go.

Hellgrammite: You're in.

Flea Man: Let's go, baby.

Hellgrammite: You're in.

Griffin: He hops forward.

Hellgrammite: Yeah.

Flea Man: Juice me up.

Hellgrammite: What's your name?

Flea Man: Tyler.

Justin: [chortles] It truly is a bug's life.

Travis: [titters]

Hellgrammite: Tyler Flea... what about the rest of you?! What about the rest of you, are you with me?

Justin: "I'm David."

"I'm Ralph."

Griffin: [chuckles]

Hellgrammite: David... I didn't—I didn't mean, you know, what's your names—

Justin: "I'm Mater!"

Griffin: [guffaws]

Justin: "I'm Godzilla!"

Travis: [laughs]

Griffin: Fuckin' DnD rules.

Justin: "It's me, Zorath!"

Griffin: [chuckles] They all approach. I mean, this mob was following you at first with like almost sort of fan-like fervor. And now it has definitely morphed into something else. They see this flea man supplicate himself to you, and how thoroughly you've controlled all these soldier ants. And like everyone just walks forward and is just trying to sort of touch the hem of your garment. And Larvosa, from the dais on which she is sort of settled, she laughs and she says:

Larvosa: Hellgrammite... Hellgrammite... once again, controlling the bugs. Your society that you plan to build is not a righteous one, Hellgrammite. You only know control... only know how to control the bugs... This is no ant farm, Hellgrammite...

[pause]

Hellgrammite: So, you do not willingly surrender the crown to me. Am I correct?

Griffin: Make an intimidation check, and I will give you advantage, because you're a god man... bug.

Travis: Use your inspiration, dad.

Griffin: Use your Baroque inspiration. [chuckles]

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Well, there's 11...

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: And there is a 20. A dirty 20.

Griffin: Dirty 20, okay. She reaches up with one of her many long, spindly limbs, and plucks the crown off of her head. And she starts to hand it towards you, and then she says:

Queen Larvosa: Would you show me one last time, the infestation, Hellgrammite?

Hellgrammite: Well, yes. [chuckles] As a matter of fact, I will.

Clint: And he concentrates. And from his hand comes a swarm of smaller insects, kind of swirling around, hovering in his hand, like a mini tornado of these mites.

Griffin: She looks up at it, fascinated. And she slides the crown over to your feet. And then she looks up at you, Hellgrammite. And it is very strange, because you, to some extent, know that you are having this vision. That you are seated in a room in the past, and just sort of like witnessing this event. But as she looks at you, Hellgrammite, you get the sense that she is looking at you. Looking at this—you get the sense that she is staring intently at the you that is seated in this room of the Trial of Divination. And she says:

Queen Larvosa: You could have been anything, and you chose this?

Griffin: And you gasp and regain your senses, as you break eye contact with your perfect effigy. And the voice calls out and says:

Voice: Aspirant, by your participation in the Conclave, you invite death's shadow to fall upon you. You are extraordinarily likely to perish during these oncoming trials. You may lose your life. But what is that worth, now that you know what your life could be? If you agree to these final terms, grasp the hand-like appendage of your effige.

Clint: He immediately grabs it, right away, no hesitation.

Griffin: As suddenly as you grasp it, there is no flash of those onyx eyes, as was the case during those first two sort of agreements. Instead, just as quickly as you grab the hand, the effigy's hand grabs yours. The stony fingers wrap around your palm. And the leather straps that make up this gauntlet that your effigy is wearing begins slithering like snakes off of its arm, and onto your arm, starting to sort of weave and reform this padded glove and these woven bindings tightly around your wrist and your forearm.

And then you see a round leather plate rear up over your elbow. And as it does so, it reveals a thin metal probe on its underside. And the way that it is reared back, the way this needle is glistening, it is quite similar to a scorpion getting ready to sting. And it slams down into your elbow. And your ulnar nerve, your funny bone, lights up like a Christmas tree. And you lose consciousness immediately.

[pause]

Griffin: When the three of you awaken, you are lying face up on a soft carpet of grass, peering upward at a cloudy afternoon sky. As you rise, you see your fellow aspirants coming to all around you. 64 wizards lie in a semicircle on the central lawn of the Zigguraut, all facing the building's central structure. It is a tiered fortress, a hundred yards wide, built from smooth gray stone that curves and slopes at inscrutable angles. As you marvel at your proximity to this place, the very seat of The Fold's magic, you also notice, as you sort of glance in your periphery, that the island is no longer floating in the waters of Loch Reach. It apparently took flight during your slumber. The island is sailing through the air.

And remembering your slumber, you inspect your arm where, indeed, a leather gauntlet has been fastened quite snugly. It's a beautiful, beautifully crafted piece of light armor with one strange feature. On the back of the glove is a hard plate dotted with these metal-ringed holes. And you identify them as mounts or settings for gemstones. Which is a conclusion that you all draw as you realize that one of these holes has already been filled with a cloudy white stone, about the size of a strawberry.

You look up from your gauntlets, as a door slams open from one of the higher tiers of the Zigguraut. And all 64 heads snap to attention as eight figures file out, the eight Arch Wizards of the Octave hold court above you all. And a bald, wispy man, clearly the eldest of the group, steps forward to the edge of the tier. And his regalia is just flapping in the wind. And he says:

First Octave Osham: Welcome, aspirants. I am First Octave Osham, and I am pleased to welcome you properly to the Conclave. As I look around me, I feel a great peace knowing my replacement shall be chosen from such a capable assembly of mages. All 64 of you have passed the Trial of

Divination, as is customary for these Conclaves. You have all agreed to the terms and conditions of this contest, as has every wizard who has ever been invited here. But now it is time for the second trial to begin. And this one, historically, is unpleasant for our aspirants. We have arrived at the moment where our warnings become manifest, and the wheel meets the road. You must steel yourselves, wizards. Your very survival depends upon it.

Griffin: And immediately, Osham is silhouetted in bright, red light, as the clouds far above the Zigguraut explode outward in a circle, forming these concentric rings of clouds across the sky, like ripples following a stone's throw into a lake. And right where the clouds burst from, you see a fireball the size of a city block emerge and begin to fall in your direction.

[The Adventure Zone Royale theme music plays]

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